

Life and Other Endings

I'm not afraid to die, I just don't want to be there when it happens

- Woody Allen

This thing we call Life is a never-ending source of wonderment to me. Beyond my son David's essay, I think of the countless magnificent curiosities I experience every day.

I began this book with a quote from Atul Gawande:

In the end, people don't view their life as merely the average of all its moments—which, after all, is mostly nothing much plus some sleep. For human beings, life is meaningful because it is a story. A story has a sense of a whole, and its arc is determined by the significant moments, the ones where something happens. Measurements of people's minute-by-minute levels of pleasure and pain miss this fundamental aspect of human existence. A seemingly happy life may be empty. A seemingly difficult life may be devoted to a great cause. We have purposes larger than ourselves.

— Atul Gawande, **Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End**

What is fascinating to me is the many, many moments in my Life which are superb and yet pass by, uncaptured and without memory. These moments may be a red fox trotting down the road at the cabin; or a jimson weed in full bloom in the morning; or a cloud moving, surging, changing as I view it. It may be my wonderment at something clever that a loved one has said or that someone has written in a book or a poem or a manuscript from long ago—or even something as simple as realizing I have dozed off and transmigrated to a world of the mind. I can live such moments, I have lived these moments, yet I cannot capture them, and thus I cannot pass them along to colleagues, to the coming generations, to my dear and gentle reader. Yet I can enjoy them, I have enjoyed them, as fleeting as that joy may be.

In the first quarter of our Life, we *know* we are immortal; in this last quarter, we accept we are mortal yet the subterfuge continues.

Quotes from "The Fault In Our Stars":

"There will come a time," I said, "when all of us are dead. All of us. There will come a time when there are no human beings remaining to remember that anyone ever existed or that our species ever did anything. [...]

"what we want is to be noticed by the universe, to have the universe give a shit what happens to us- not the collective idea of sentient life but each of us as individuals."

"I believe the universe wants to be noticed. I think the universe is improbably biased toward consciousness, that it rewards intelligence in part because the universe enjoys its elegance being observed. And who am I, living in the middle of history, to tell the universe that it - or my observation of it - is temporary?"

"I fear oblivion" he said. "I fear it like a proverbial blind man fears the dark"

— **Augustus Waters The Fault in Our Stars**

"He took a long drink, then grimaced. "I do not have a drinking problem," he announced, his voice needlessly loud. "I have a Churchillian relationship with alcohol: I can crack jokes and govern England and do anything I want to do. Except not drink."

— **John Green, The Fault in Our Stars**

I know that love is just a shout into the void, and that oblivion is inevitable, and that we're all doomed and that there will come a day when all our labor has been returned to dust, and I know the sun will swallow the only earth we'll ever have, and I am in love with you."

"There are infinite numbers between 0 and 1. There's .1 and .12 and .112 and an infinite collection of others. Of course, there is a bigger infinite set of numbers between 0 and 2, or between 0 and a million. Some infinities are bigger than other infinities. A writer we used to like taught us that. There are days, many of them, when I resent the size of my unbounded set. I want more numbers than I'm likely to get, and God, I want more numbers for Augustus Waters than he got. But, Gus, my love, I cannot tell you how thankful I am for our little infinity. I wouldn't trade it for the world. You gave me a forever within the numbered days, and I'm grateful."

A Spectrum of Perishability within Publications

"There will come a time when all of us are dead. All of us. There will come a time when there are no human beings remaining to remember that anyone ever existed or that our species ever did anything. There will be no one left to remember Aristotle or Cleopatra, let alone you. Everything that we did and built and wrote and thought and discovered will be forgotten and all of this will have been for naught. Maybe that time is coming soon and maybe it is millions of years away, but even if we survive the collapse of our sun, we will not survive forever. There was time before organisms experienced consciousness, and there will be time after. And if the inevitability of human oblivion worries you, I encourage you to ignore it. God knows that's what everyone else does."

— **John Green, The Fault in Our Stars**

"Augustus Waters was a self-aggrandizing bastard. But we forgive him. We forgive him not because he had a heart as figuratively good as his literal one sucked, or because he knew more about how to hold a cigarette than any nonsmoker in history, or because he got eighteen years when he should've gotten more.'

'Seventeen,' Gus corrected.

'I'm assuming you've got some time, you interrupting bastard.'

'I'm telling you,' Isaac continued, 'Augustus Waters talked so much that he'd interrupt you at his own funeral. And he was pretentious: Sweet Jesus Christ, that kid never took a piss without pondering the abundant metaphorical resonances of human waste production. And he was vain: I do not believe I have ever met a more physically attractive person who was more acutely aware of his own physical attractiveness.'

'But I will say this: When the scientists of the future show up at my house with robot eyes and they tell me to try them on, I will tell the scientists to screw off, because I do not want to see a world without him.'

I was kind of crying by then."

— **John Green, The Fault in Our Stars**

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"Sometimes, you read a book and it fills you with this weird evangelical zeal, and you become convinced that the shattered world will never be put back together unless and until all living humans read the book. And then there are books like *An Imperial Affliction*, which you can't tell people about, books so special and rare and yours that advertising your affection feels like betrayal"

— **John Green, The Fault in Our Stars**